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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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SAFE FLIGHT ESSENTIAL FOR NEARLY EXTINCT WHOOPING CRANES

Director John L. Farley of the Fish and Wildlife Service today urged the public to afford the rare whooping cranes all possible protection as these giant white birds make their annual spring migration from Texas to their breeding grounds in the far north.

The latest report from Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on Texas' Gulf Coast--where the world's sole surviving flock of "whoopers" spend the winter--reveals that the resonant-voiced birds, now numbering a mere 21, are heading northward.

The migration takes the tenacious cranes, threatened with extinction for many years, from their Texas wintering grounds to Canada's northwest territory by way of Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and North Dakota. Residents of these States are particularly urged to do all possible to support the Federal law which prohibits shooting or otherwise molesting these birds. A safe passage through these States is essential as the cranes move northward in small groups to reproduce their kind. Only by increasing their numbers can these valient creatures win a decisive victory in the fight for survival of their species.

Four feet in height, with a wingspread of seven feet, the average whooping crane is not difficult to identify. In flight, its long neck and spindly legs are completely outstretched. Its white body, black wingtips, and resounding "whoop" distinguish it from other birds.

New concern for the whoopers was felt last fall when the cranes' numbers dropped from 24 to 21. Despite Federal efforts to save the unique birds from extinction, natural losses and careless or malicious gunfire have held down the growth of the flock. The first official count of whooping cranes in 1938-39 revealed 18 birds. In 1941-42 the flock reached a low point of 15. The population then rose gradually to 34 in 1949-50 but declined again to 21 in 1952-53. The 1953 autumn count of 24, which included three offspring, revived hope for the species' survival which now again seems to hing on an uphill battle.

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